

B 54/989

SELF-GUIDED AUTO TOUR

NATIONAL BISON RANGE



I 49.6/2:



Bison

RED SLEEP MOUNTAIN DRIVE

[19 miles (30.5 Km)—Driving time 2 hours]

This drive takes you over the top of Red Sleep Mountain and gives you access to areas where you may observe some of the many bird and mammal species that inhabit the Range.

Your chance of seeing wildlife depends on the weather, time of day (early morning and evening hours are best), the habits of each species, the speed at which you drive and your ability to "spot" birds and animals. You will find binoculars or a spotting scope helpful. We hope you have a pleasant drive.

* CAUTION *

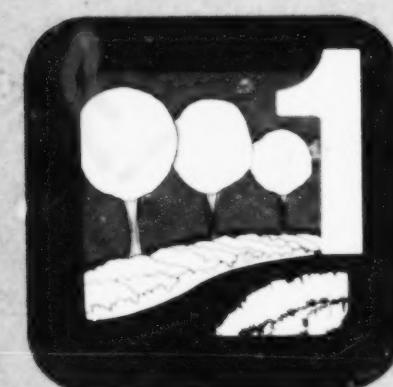
- One-way road has switchbacks and steep grades—No guard rails—Go at your own risk.
- Rattlesnakes are common. Be careful. Stay on roadway.
- Bison and elk are unpredictable and can be very dangerous.

* REGULATIONS *

- Remain at your car and on the road at all times.
- Vehicles must stay on the main roads.
- Firearms must be unloaded and dismantled or cased.
- All regulations are strictly enforced so please read and adhere to all signs.
- All pets must be on a leash.



Tour Route Habitats



HABITATS

What is a habitat? A habitat is a place that provides a living creature with everything needed for survival. Habitats can be as small as a drop of pond water for some microscopic organisms, or as large as a continent for migratory waterfowl. The Bison Range is capable of supporting a wide array of wildlife because it provides a wide variety of suitable habitats. You will travel through three major habitat types: grassland, forest, and streamside thickets. Each of these can be observed from this site. Point of interest, 2.7 miles.

Elk Lane

Originally constructed to aid in live-trapping of surplus elk which were used to restock other areas. It leads to a set of corrals and loading chutes about 1 mile north. The lane is now used principally for the annual buffalo roundup. Next stop 2.6 miles.

**WATCH FOR THE
NUMBERED SIGNS**



Elk



THE ECOTONES

When two or more habitats overlap, an edge or ecotone is the result. In these ecotonal areas, plant species from each of the habitat types reside together. These are important wildlife areas because not only are animals from more

than one habitat represented, but species unique to the ecotone are also present.

Here at station two, you will have an opportunity to stretch your legs while walking through an ecotone. The trailhead is situated on a moist, cool, north-facing slope. This habitat type is dominated by the short-needed Douglas fir tree. The end of the trail is located on a dry, warm, south-facing slope. This habitat type is dominated by the grasses, and the long-needed Ponderosa pine. In the spring, the yellow-flowered "balsamroot" turns the slopes a showy yellow.

Between these two distinct habitat types, the trail crosses over a ridge. You will probably notice that both the short-needed Douglas fir and the long-needed Ponderosa pine grow in this area along with the grasses. This is an ecotone, a good place to quietly watch for birds and small mammals. Next stop 0.7 miles.



Ninepipe National Wildlife Refuge



OF GLACIERS AND DUCKS

Twelve thousand years ago, a massive glacier covered the valley below. As the glacier receded large blocks of ice were left buried in the glacial till. These ice blocks gradually melted leaving depressions in

the landscape which then filled with water. These glacial potholes, now ponds surrounded by cattails, provide critical habitat for waterfowl. The Flathead Valley supports one of the largest breeding populations of redhead ducks on the continent and a good resident population of Canada geese.

Ninepipe National Wildlife Refuge, administered by the Bison Range is visible 8 miles to the north and is part of an effort to save the valley's habitat resources.

Ancient Lake Missoula

As the glaciers melted an ice dam formed on the Clark Fork River near the Montana/Idaho border and created prehistoric Lake Missoula. The High Point of the Bison Range was an island in the lake which reached a level of 4,200 feet in elevation and covered 3,300 square miles of western Montana. Marks of old shorelines can still be seen on the hillsides along the tour.



American Pronghorn Antelope



GRASSLANDS

Although beautiful, grassland habitats are by no means gentle. More often than not, it is a harsh environment, making great demands on its inhabitants and exacting a merciless toll on those who fail. Although the Flathead Valley

is characterized by a relatively mild climate, dry spells can extend into drought, temperatures can at times be extreme and fine soils are blown away if not protected by plant life.

Wild creatures of the grassland reflect the rigors of their environment. Each has adapted its own unique strategy for survival; consider the lack of cover on a grassland and the resulting lack of protection during severe winters. Bison, the prairie masters, carry their shelter with them in the form of a thick, shaggy coat; pronghorns seek the cover of brushy draws, ground squirrels burrow underground, away from the torturous elements; and finally, migratory birds avoid the problem altogether by flying south. Next stop 2.4 miles.



White-tailed Deer



RIPARIAN ZONES

Of all the refuge habitats, perhaps none is richer in life and diversity than the riparian, or streamside, communities. Riparian zones abound in broadleaf plantlife, in contrast to the dryer surrounding rangelands where the predominate

plants are slender-leaved grasses.

The thickets and marshes of the riparian zones and the resulting ecotones provide ideal habitats for a wide variety of wildlife including: white-tailed deer, songbirds, small mammals, birds of prey, and waterfowl. During the winter, diving ducks and mallards may concentrate along this stream within the Bison Range. Common summering waterfowl species include mallard, common merganser, wood duck and Canada geese. Point of interest 1 mile.

• Bison Corrals

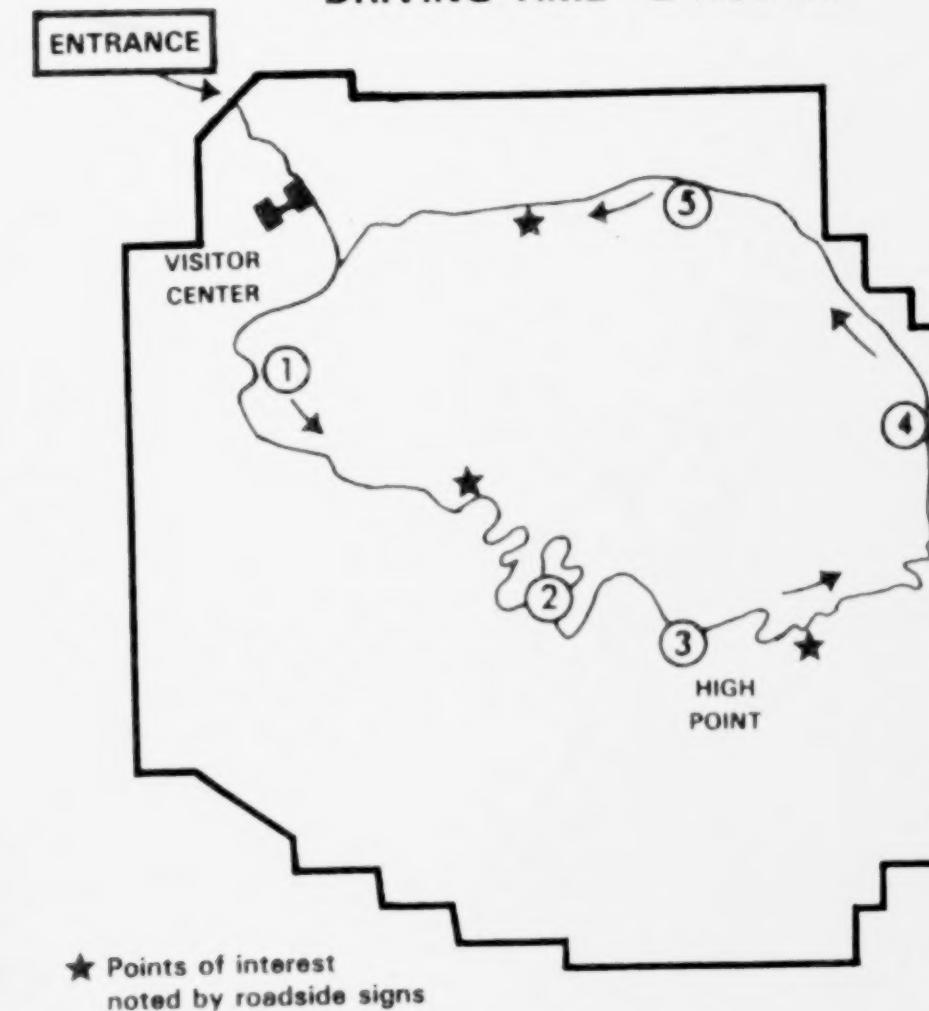
The buffalo herd is worked here during the annual roundup in October. A predetermined number of animals are sold by sealed bid each fall to maintain a proper balance with the available food supply.



Blue Grouse

RED SLEEP MOUNTAIN DRIVE

ONE-WAY - 19 MILES
DRIVING TIME - 2 HOURS



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